

AN OVERVIEW OF STRATEGY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Sri Wahyuni¹

Abstract

This article describes about Strategy in Language Learning. Learning strategy are steps taken by students to enhance their own learning. Strategies are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence. Appropriate language learning strategies result in improved proficiency and greater self-confidence. Owing to conditioning by the culture and the educational system, however, many language students (even adults) are passive and accustomed to being spoon-fed. They like to be told what to do, and they do only what is clearly essential to get a good grade-even if they fail to develop useful skills in the process. A general overview of the system in language learning strategies are divided into two major classes: direct and indirect. These two classes are subdivided into a total of six groups (memory, cognitive, and composition under the direct class; metacognitive, affective and social under the indirect class). Direct strategies and indirect strategies support each other and each strategy is capable in connecting with and assisting for every other strategy.

Key Words: *Strategies, Language Learning*

¹ Sri Wahyuni, Dosen Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, STKIP Bina Bangsa Getsempena, Banda Aceh, Email: sri@stkipgetsempena.ac.id

Introduction

Researchers have formally discovered and named language learning strategies only recently, such strategies have actually been used for thousands of years. One well-known example is mnemonic or memory devices used in ancient times to help storytellers remember their lines. Throughout history, the best language students have used strategies, ranging from naturalistic language practice techniques to analytic, rule-based strategy.

Certain cognitive strategies, such as analyzing and particular memory strategies, like the keyword technique, are highly useful for understanding and recalling new information-important functions in the process of becoming competent in using the new language. Compensation strategies aid learners in overcoming competent in using the new language. Compensation strategies aids learners in overcoming knowledge gaps and continuing to communicate authentically; thus, these strategies help communicative competence to blossom.

Discussion

A. A Word about Terminology

The following are some important terms:

Lerning and acquisition, process orientation, four language skills, second language and foreign language, communication communicative competence and learning strategies.

Learning and Acquisition

According to one well-known contrast, *learning* is conscious knowledge rules, does not typically lead to conversational fluency and is derived from formal instruction.

Acquisition, on the other hand, occurs uncounsciously and spontaneously, does lead to conversational fluency and arises from naturalistic language use. Some specialists-even suggest that learning cannot contribute to acquisition, for example: that “conscious” gain in knowledge cannot influence “subconscious” development of language.

However, this distinction seems too rigid. It is likely that learning and acquisition are not mutually exclusive but are rather parts of a potentially integrated range of experience. “Our knowledge about what is conscious and whatt is subconscious is too vague for use to use the (learning-acquisition) distinction reliably,” says one expert; moreover, some elements of language use are at first councious and then become uncounscious or automatic through practice. Many language education experts suggest that both aspects-acquisition and learning-are necessary for communicative competence, particularly at higher skill levels. For these reasons, a learning-acquisition continuum is more accurate than a dichotomy in describing how language abilities are developed.

Process Orientation

Interest has been shifting from a limited focus on merely what students learn to acquire-the *product or outcome* of language learning and acquisition-the *process* by which learning or acquisition occurs. This new emphasis involves looking at a variety of process factors: the development of an interlanguage (the learner’s hybrib from of language use that ranges somewhere in between the first or native language and the

actual new language being learned), the kinds of errors and mistakes the learners make and the reasons for them, the learner's social and emotional adaptation to the new knowledge and culture, the amount and kind of activities available to the learner inside and outside of class and the learner's reactions to specific classroom techniques and methods and to out-of-class experiences with the language.

Four Language Skill

Gaining a new language necessarily involves developing four modalities in varying degrees and combinations: listening, reading, speaking and writing. Among language teachers, these modalities are known as *the four language skills* or just *the four skill*. Culture and grammar are sometimes called skills, too, but they are somewhat different from the Big Four; both of these intersect and overlap with listening, reading, speaking and writing in particular ways. The term *skill* simply means ability, expertness or proficiency. Skill are incrementally during the language development process.

Communication, Communicative Competence and Related Concepts

The word *communication* comes from a Latin word for "commonness," including the prefix *com-* which suggests togetherness, joining, cooperation and mutuality. Therefore, communication is definable as "a mutual exchange between two or more individuals which enhances cooperation and establishes commonality". **Communication** is also seen as dynamic, not static and as depending on the negotiation of meaning between two or more persons who share some knowledge of the

language being used. **Communicative Competence** is competence or ability to communicate. It concern both spoken or written language and all four language skills. Language learning expert have commonly used the term **communication strategies** to refer only to certain types of speaking strategies, thus unwittingly giving the false impression that the skills of reading, listening and writing- and the language used via these modalities-are not really equal partners in communication.

One very useful model provides a comprehensive, four-part definition of communicative competence:

1. *Grammatical Competence or Accuracy*
2. *Sociolinguistic Competence*
3. *Discourse Competence*
4. *Strategic Competence*

Learning Strategies

The word *strategy* comes from the ancient Greek term *strategia* meaning generalship or the art of war. In nonmilitary settings, the strategy concepts has been applied to clearly non-adversarial situations, where it has come to mean a plan, step or conscious action toward achievement of an objective. The strategy concepts, without its aggressive and competitive trappings, has become influential in education where it has taken on a new meaning and has been transformed into **learning strategies**. One commonly used technical definition says that learning strategies are operations employed by the learner to add the acquisition, storage, retrieval and use of information.

B. FEATURES OF LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

Communicative Competence as the Main Goal

Language learning strategies stimulate the growth of communicative competence in general. Example, metacognitive (“beyond the cognitive”) strategies help learners to regulate their own cognition and to focus, plan and evaluate their progress as they move toward

communicative competence. Affective strategies develop the self-confidence and perseverance needed for learners to involve themselves actively in language learning, a requirement for attaining communicative competence. Social strategies provide increased interaction and more empathetic understanding, two qualities necessary to reach communicative competence.

FEATURES OF LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

No.	Language Learning Strategies
1.	Contribute to the main goal, communicative competence
2.	Allow learners to become more self-directed
3.	Expand the role of teachers
4.	Are problem oriented
5.	Are specific actions taken by the learner
6.	Involve many aspects of the learner, not just the cognitive
7.	Support learning both directly and indirectly
8.	Are not always observable
9.	Are often conscious
10.	Can be taught
11.	Are flexible
12.	Are influenced by a variety of factors

Greater Self-Direction for Learners

Language learning strategies encourage greater overall self-direction for learners. Self-direction is particularly important for language learners, because they will not always have the teacher around to guide them as they use the language outside the classroom. Moreover, self direction is essential to the active development of ability in a new language.

Owing to conditioning by the culture and the educational system, however, many

language students (even adults) are passive and accustomed to being spoon-fed. They like to be told what to do, and they do only what is clearly essential to get a good grade-even if they fail to develop useful skills in the process. Attitudes and behaviors like these make learning more difficult and must be changed, or else any effort to train learners to rely more on themselves and used better strategies is bound to fail. Just teaching new strategies to students will accomplish very little unless

students begin to want greater responsibility for their own learning.

New Roles for Teachers

Teachers traditionally expect to be viewed as authority figures, identified with roles like parent, instructor, director, manager, judge, leader, evaluator, controller and even doctor, who must “cure” the ignorance of the students. New teaching capacities also include identifying students’ learning strategies, conducting training on learning strategies, and helping learners become more independent. In this process, teacher do not necessarily forsake all their old managerial and instructional tasks, but these elements become much less dominant. These changes strengthen teachers’ roles, making them more varied and more creative. Their status is no longer based on hierarchical authority, but on the quality and importance of their relationship with learners. When students take more responsibility, more learning occurs, and both teachers and learners feel more successful.

Other Features

Other important features of language strategies are problem orientation, action basis, involvement beyond just cognition, ability to support learning directly or indirectly, degree of observability, level of consciousness, teachability, flexibility and influences on strategy choice.

➤ **Problem Orientation**

Language learning strategies are tools. They are used because there is a problem to solve, a task to accomplish, an objective to meet, or a goal to attain. Such as, a learner using one of the reasoning or guessing

strategies to better understand a foreign language reading passage. Memory strategies are used because there is something that must be remembered. Affective strategies are used to help the learner relax or gain greater confidence, so that more profitable learning can take place.

➤ **Action Basis**

Related to the problem orientation of language learning strategies is their action basis. Language learning strategies are specific actions or behaviors accomplished by students to enhance their learning.

➤ **Involvement beyond just Cognition,**

Language learning strategies are not restricted to cognitive functions, such as those dealing with mental processing and manipulation or the new language. Strategies also include metacognitive functions like planning, evaluating and arranging one’s own learning; and emotional (affective), social and other functions as well.

➤ **Directly and Indirect Support**

Some learning strategies involve direct learning and use of the subject matter, in this case a new language. These are known as *direct strategies*. Other strategies including metacognitive, affective and social strategies, contribute indirectly but powerfully to learning. These are known as *indirect strategies*. Direct and indirect strategies are equally important and serve to support each other in any ways.

➤ **Degree of Observability**

Language learning strategies are not always readily observable to the human eye. Many aspects of cooperating, a strategy in

which the learner works with someone else to achieve a learning goal, can be observed, but the act of making mental associations, an important memory strategy, cannot be seen. It is often difficult for teacher to know about their students' learning strategies, because some strategies are hard to observe even with the help of videotape and closed-circuit television. Another problem with observing learning strategies is that many strategies are used (as they should be!) outside of the class room in informal, naturalistic situations unobservable by the teacher.

➤ **Level of Consciousness**

The ancient Greek definition of strategies, given above, implies consciousness and intentionality. Many modern uses of learning strategies reflect conscious efforts by learners to take control of their learning, and some researchers seem to suggest that learning strategies are always conscious action. However, after certain amount of practice and use, learning strategies, like any other skill or behavior, can become automatic-that is, unconscious-is often a very desirable thing, especially for language learning.

➤ **Teach ability**

Some aspects of the learners' makeup, like general learning style or personality traits, are very difficult to change. In contrast, learning strategies are easier to teach and modify. This can be done through strategy training, which is an essential part of language education. Even the best learner can improve their strategy use through such training. Strategy learning helps guide learners to become more conscious of strategy use and

more adept at employing appropriate strategies. Strategy training is most effective when students why and when specific strategies are important, how to use these strategies, and how to transfer them to new situations. Strategy training must also take into account learners' and teachers' attitudes toward learner self-direction, language learning and particular language and culture in question.

➤ **Flexibility**

Language learning strategies are flexible; that is, they are not always found in predictable sequences or in precise patterns. There is a great deal of individuality in the way learners choose, combine and sequence strategies. The ways that learners do so is the subject of much current research.

➤ **Factor Influencing Strategy Choice**

Many factors affect the choice of strategies: degree of awareness, stage of learning, stage of learning, task requirements, teacher expectations, age, sex, nationality/ethnicity, general learning style, personality traits, motivation level, and purpose for learning the language. In a nutshell, learners who are more aware and more advanced seem to use better strategies. Task requirements help determine strategy choice; learners would not use the same strategies for writing a composition as for chatting in a cafe. Teacher expectations, expressed through classroom instructional and testing methods, strongly shape learners, strategies; such as, classroom emphasis on discrete-point on grammar-learning will result in development of learning strategies like

analysis and reasoning, rather than more global strategies for communication.

C. A NEW SYSTEM OF LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

The strategies system presented here differs in several ways from earlier attempts to classify strategies. It is more comprehensive and detailed; it is more systematic in linking individual strategies, as well as strategy groups, with each of the four language skills and it uses less technical terminology. Visual and verbal cues are used throughout this book for understanding and remembering the system.

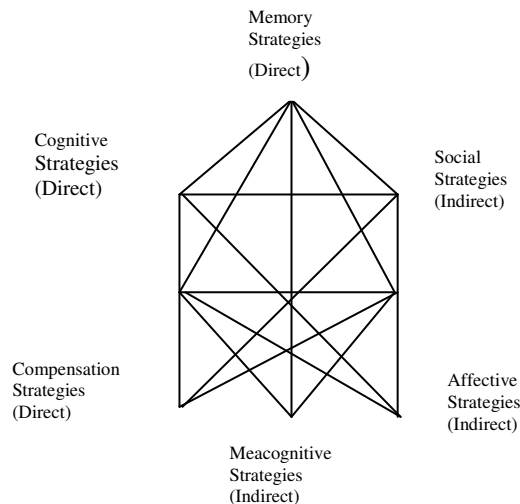
A general overview of the system of language learning strategies. Strategies divided into two major classes: direct and indirect. These two classes are subdivided into a total of six groups (memory, cognitive, and composition under the direct class; metacognitive, affective and social under the indirect class). Direct strategies and indirect strategies support each other and that each strategy group is capable in connecting with and assisting every other strategy group.

1. Mutual Support

The first major class, direct strategies for dealing with the new language, is like the

performer in a stage play, working with the language itself in a variety of specific tasks and situations. The direct class is composed of memory strategies for remembering and retrieving new information, cognitive strategies for understanding and producing the language, and compensation strategies for using the language despite knowledge gaps. The performer works closely with the Director for the best possible outcome.

The second major strategies class—indirect strategies for general management of learning—can be likened to the Director of the play. This class is made up of metacognitive strategies for coordinating the learning process, affective strategies for regulating emotions and social strategies for learning with others. The Director serves a host of functions, like focusing, organizing, guiding, checking, correcting, coaching, encouraging, and cheering the performer as well as ensuring that the performer works cooperatively with other actors in the play. The Director is an *internal* guide and support to the performer. The functions of both the Director and the Performer become part of the learner, as he or she accepts increased responsibility for learning.



Interrelationships between Direct and Indirect Strategies and Among the Six Strategy Groups.

The teacher allows and encourages the learner to take on more of the Director functions that might have earlier been reserved, at least overtly, for the teacher. In the past, teachers might have been the ones to correct learner errors and tell the learner exactly what to do when. Now learners do more of this for themselves, while teachers'

functions become somewhat less directive and more facilitating. For instance, the metacognitive category helps students to regulate their own cognition by assessing how they are learning and by planning for future language tasks, but metacognitive self-assessment and planning often require reasoning, which is itself a cognitive strategy.

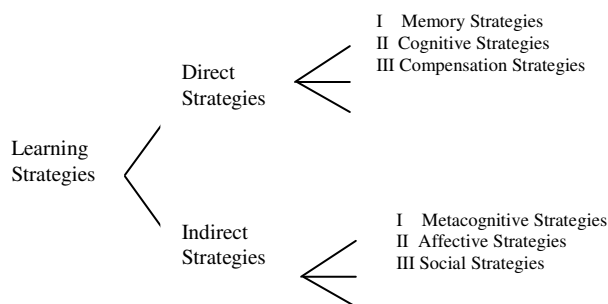


Diagram of the Strategy System

2. Cautions

It is very important to remember that any current understanding of language learning strategies is necessarily in its infancy and any existing system of strategies is only a proposal to be tested through practical

classroom use and through research. At this stage in the short history of language learning strategy research, there is no complete agreement on exactly what strategies are; how many strategies exist; how they should be defined, demacrated, and catagorized; and

whether it is-or ever will be-possible to create a real, scientifically validated hierarchy of strategies. Some language learning strategies, such as naturalistic practice, are very broad, containing many possible activities, while others, like the keyword technique, are narrower, but breadth or narrowness cannot be the sole basis of a hierarchical structure for strategies.

Furthermore, the classification conflicts are inevitable. A given strategy, such as using synonyms is the exact word is not known to the learner, is classed by some experts as a learning strategy, but it is unceremoniously thrown out of the learning strategy arena by other experts, who think it is merely a communication strategy which is not useful for learning. Also, there is confusion among some strategy specialists as to whether a particular strategy, like self-monitoring, should be called direct or indirect; this may be because researchers often classify a particular strategy differently at different times, in light of new insights. These difficulties are understandable, given the early stage of investigation concerning language learning strategies.

Despite problem in classifying strategies, research continues to prove that strategies help learners take control of their learning and become more proficient, and the experience of many teachers indicates that the strategy system shown above is a very useful way to examine such strategies. This system provides, albeit imperfect form, a comprehensive structure for understanding strategies. It includes a wide variety of affective and social strategies which are not

often enough considered by strategy researchers, teachers or students.

CONCLUSION

Language learning strategies contribute to all part of the learning-acquisition continuum, for instance, analytic strategies are directly related to the learning end of the continuum, while strategies involving naturalistic practice facilitate the acquisition of language learning, and guessing and memory strategies are equally useful to both learning and acquisition. The strategy concepts, without its aggressive and competitive trappings, has become influential in education where it has taken on a new meaning and has been transformed into *learning strategies*.

One commonly used technical definition says that learning strategies are operations employed by the learner to add the acquisition, storage, retrieval and use of information.

The classification conflicts are inevitable. A given strategy, such as using synonyms is the exact word is not known to the learner, is classed by some experts as a learning strategy, but it is unceremoniously thrown out of the learning strategy arena by other experts, who think it is merely a communication strategy which is not useful for learning. Also, there is confusion among some strategy specialists as to whether a particular strategy, like self-monitoring, should be called direct or indirect; this may be because researchers often classify a particular strategy differently at different times, in light of new insights. These difficulties are understandable, given the early

stage of investigation concerning language learning strategies.

Despite problem in classifying strategies, research continues to prove that strategies help learners take control of their learning and become more proficient, and the experience of many teachers indicates that the strategy system shown above is a very useful

way to examine such strategies. This system provides, albeit imperfect form, a comprehensive structure for understanding strategies. It includes a wide variety of affective and social strategies which are not often enough considered by strategy researchers, teachers or students.

REFERENCES

- A. Waden & J. Rabin, *Learner Strategies in Language Learning*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Praentice-Hall 1987.
- Brown, H.D, *Principle of Language Learning and Teaching* , Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Praentice-Hall 1987.
- Chamot, A.U, *The Power of Learning Strategies*. Ohio Bilingual-Multicultural, 1987.
- Cohen, A.D, *Studying Learner Strategies:How we get the information*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ:Praentice-Hall 1987.
- Dickinson, L. *Self-instruction in Language Learning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1987.
- Oxford, R. *A new Taxonomy of Second Language Learning Strategies*, DC: ERIC Clearing House on Languages and Linguistics, Washington 1985.
- Rebecca L. Oxrord, *Language Learning Strategies (What Every Teacher Should Know)*, Heinle & Heinle Publishers, Boston 1990.
- Weden, A.L & Rubin, J. *Learner Strategies in Language Learning*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ:Praentice-Hall 1987.